

The Mystery of Multiplication

by David Guzik

The mystery of multiplication is a story of how God's work grows and expands through the prayers, passion, and self-sacrificing work of His people, as well as through the organic and deliberate methods of church planting and ministry extension.

Duration: 30:39

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:9

Topics: "Church Growth", "Holy Spirit"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the mystery of multiplication in Christianity, showcasing historical examples of exponential growth in the faith. It explores the balance between organic growth, driven by the Holy Spirit, and deliberate planning in spreading the Gospel. The speaker highlights the need for prayer, passion, and self-sacrifice in witnessing God's work multiply, both globally and within local communities.

Transcript

That pig hunting is not as easy as it looks. The topic for our final session here is the mystery of multiplication. Christianity is the story of multiplication.

In AD 100 there was approximately one Christian for every 360 people on earth. So think about that, a crowd of 360 people and one of them is a Christian. Today, it's now almost one Christian for every five people on earth.

That's a big change through the centuries. And it's happened over and over again. It happens just in the recent past.

Here's another example. In 1950, when China was closed to foreign missionaries, there were one million believers in the country. Today, conservative estimates say there are well over 80 million Christians.

People believe there are as many as 100 million Christians in China. Every day, 28,000 people become believers in China. That's a story of multiplication.

Every day worldwide, 74,000 people become Christians around the globe somewhere. That's 27 million people a year. Remarkable, isn't it? Now, that's very encouraging to us, but it doesn't make us passive, right? Because you can hear about all these great statistics about what God's doing in China, what God's doing in Africa, what God's doing in Latin America.

But you and I, we say, what's God doing in our community, right? We want to see the work of God multiplied, expanded, made more broad in our very own community. Listen, we understand that this idea of multiplication has to be true from generation to generation. Now, I don't want to sound like I'm pessimistic, because I'm not.

I'm very optimistic when I look about the future of what God wants to do. But it is true that Christianity in every generation is only one generation from perishing from the earth. If it doesn't pass on from one generation to another, then it's gone, and it's gone in a generation.

And we realize as well that this mystery or miracle of multiplication, it does not happen apart from the prayers and the passion and the self-sacrificing work of God's people, right? It's not like God's people just sit back passively and God does something. No, He works through the prayer, through the energy, through the passion of His people, through the passion of people just like you. And we realize as well, it has to happen in our communities, right? As I made reference to before, it's wonderful what God might be doing in China or Africa or Latin America, but we plead for God to be working right here among us, right? In our cities, in our neighborhoods, in our families, we want to see God do this work of multiplication.

So how does it happen? Look, I think we come back to some basic principles in Christian life and Christian living. For that, I want you to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 15. And we come back to a tremendous question that's asked many times by people either consciously or unconsciously.

They're asking this question, how does God do His work? How does this mystery of multiplication happen? Does it happen because God does it or does it happen because I do it? Look at it here in 1 Corinthians 15. Now, I'm just going to read verses 9 and 10, which takes a lot of self-control because it's a tremendous chapter. But verses 9 and 10, Paul says, You know, in the context of this, Paul isn't really talking about grace or his personal testimony or anything like that.

In the whole context of 1 Corinthians chapter 15, he's talking about what? He's talking about the resurrection. Especially the resurrection of Jesus and our resurrection. And in talking about that, Paul's establishing the point.

Jesus Christ rose again from the dead and He was seen by the disciples and He was seen by many. And then finally, the resurrected Jesus was seen by Paul himself. That's where he brings it to himself in verse 9, the verses we just read.

But why was Paul the last one in line to see the resurrected Jesus? Why him? Why wasn't somebody else last in line? Well, Paul says why? Verse 9. Because he is the least of the apostles. Matter of fact, if you saw it there in verse 9, he considered that he wasn't even worthy to be called an apostle. Why? Because he persecuted the church of God.

Nevertheless, even though Paul knew that was true, even though he felt that in his gut, look at what he says. He was an apostle. And he was an apostle by the grace of God.

Don't you love that statement? By the grace of God, I am what I am. And that grace was the reason why Paul was an apostle. At the same time, Paul got to work.

And that's what he says, this radical statement in verse 10. Sometimes I read lines like this in the Bible, I can hardly believe they're in there. I rub my eyes and go, Paul, can you say that? You see what he says? I labored more abundantly than they all.

Now do you know who they are there in verse 10? It's the other apostles. Peter, John, James, Bartholomew, especially Bartholomew. Any of the other ones, whatever.

Paul takes a look at all those other apostles and what does he say? I work harder than any of them. Paul, where's that humility we love in you? You know, how would you feel if one of us pastors here, who's speaking or doing ministry here this month, we got up and said, well, you know what? God bless Lance and Rick and Bruce and Rob, of course, God bless them all. I work harder than any of those lazy bums.

You'd say, what are you saying? How can you say that? But that's exactly what Paul's saying. He said that he labored more abundantly and why? So that the grace of God given to him would not be in vain. In other words, there would be a sense in which Paul, if he didn't work hard, it would be given in vain.

Something would be wasted, some gifts, some enabling of God. So Paul said, no way, I don't want that to happen. So I am going to work hard.

Now at the same time, even on top of that, if we can put a third at the same time, he recognized that even his hard work was the gift of God's grace, right? That's what he says at the end of verse 10. Yet not I, but the grace of God, which was within me. So if you were to ask Paul, Paul, why have you been fruitful in ministry? Has it been the Lord's work or has it been your hard work? You know what Paul would say? Yes.

Without reservation, Paul would say, I've worked hard. I planned, I labored, I strategized, I did the very best I could. I put my effort to it.

I had sleepless nights. I endured much pain. I worked through a lot of difficulty.

I worked with hard people and easy people. I went all over the place. I extended myself to the utmost.

I worked very hard and I'm not going to deny it. But yet on top of it all, I know it was the grace of God. The two do not cancel each other out.

Now, a related question to this whole idea, the mystery of multiplication, is simply this. Is multiplication of God's work, is it organic or is it deliberately planned? Okay, I'm going to say that again because everything I say now for the next 20 minutes, it's going to be based on those two ideas. Multiplication in the work of God, is it organic or is it deliberately planned? You know what I think Paul would say? Yes.

Yes. Yes. Now here are some things to think about here.

Sometimes the work of God is more organic and sometimes it is more deliberately planned. Organic has the idea of just simply springing forth from life. It's of more spontaneity, of less planning.

It just happens because it's alive. You guys have a tree perhaps in a garden or a backyard and you see how little trees grow up from it, right? Nobody has to plant it. The seeds just grow down, there's a living thing, some of those seeds germinate, it grows up.

It's just organic. It multiplies because it is alive. That's organic.

Deliberately planned? That has the idea of more working from a strategy, from the wisdom and the experience of a man or a team of people, of assembling resources and plans and so forth and implementing them for an effective work. Organic, you turn around and it's just happened, the ministries multiply. Deliberately planned, you say no, we feel God calling us to do this, and we're going to plan it,

we're going to resource it, we're going to strategize, we're going to make up a strategy for it all, and you implement it that way.

This is what I want to get through to everybody. God can use both more organic and more deliberately planned methods of church planting and furthering his kingdom. Multiplication in ministry can happen along either emphasis.

Now I found this especially meaningful to my own mind, to my own heart, as I've been teaching through the book of Acts, and I noticed something in Paul's church planting ministry. As he went around the Mediterranean world to plant churches, sometimes it was more organic, and sometimes it was more deliberately planned. Let me give you an example of a church, not one that Paul planted, but a church in the New Testament that was very organic.

You ready for this? Acts chapter 11 verses 19, 20, and 21. Turn there in your Bibles. Acts chapter 11 verses 19, 20, and 21, and let me just read to you those verses.

Acts 11, 19. Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus.

And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. Ladies and gentlemen, that's the beginning of the church in Antioch. And do you see what? Totally organic.

Was there a missions team that went out and did it? Was there an apostle from Jerusalem who went out and founded the church in Antioch? Was it the result of anybody's deliberate strategy? No, you want to know the strategy that founded the church at Antioch? Here it is. Run for your life, they're persecuting us in Jerusalem. That was the strategy.

And they just went everywhere. And some of them came to Antioch under that great run for your life strategy, and they did something that, as far as we know, had never been done before. They deliberately evangelized Gentile people.

And they started coming to the Lord there in Antioch. And you know what? The church there in Antioch becomes the shining example of a New Testament church very quickly in the book of Acts, eclipsing the church in Jerusalem. It's kind of a mind blower.

I need to be a little careful as I speak here because I don't want to ruffle any feathers, but man, the church in Jerusalem becomes very straight-laced and stodgy and headquarters-ish. The life, the vitality, the extension of God's kingdom, that's happening in Antioch. Antioch becomes the church you'd really want to go to, right? And they're the ones that sent out Paul.

They're the ones who sent out Barnabas. It was that first congregation to target Gentiles. It was the home church and the sending church of Paul and Barnabas.

If you were to put an interviewer microphone in front of Paul the Apostle and say, what's your home church? You know what he'd say. Antioch. It was the first deliberately missionary church, the first church to deliberately send out mission teams to go out plant churches other places.

And it wasn't founded by any of the apostles. It wasn't founded by headquarters. It wasn't founded by any strategy.

It wasn't founded by a single named leader in the book of Acts. The founders of the work, you saw it right there, were men from Cyprus and Cyrene. And let me tell you, I can't wait to meet those men in heaven because they're heroes in the book of Acts.

Some of the anonymous people in the book of Acts are the greatest heroes. Those men started a dynamic work that reaches to us even today because of their missionary endeavors. Okay, that's the church at Antioch.

Unbelievably organic. You want a contrasting church to that? A church that's a result of more deliberately planning and effort? That would be the church in Ephesus. Now there's not one passage I can point to because the church of Ephesus really has its origins in Acts 16, 18, and 19.

But that church there was much more deliberately planned and targeted by Paul. You see, Paul rightly saw Ephesus as an important strategic city. And he worked over a long period of time to launch a work there.

He assembled a team and he thoughtfully put them to work. In Acts 16, this is at verse 6, Paul tried to target Ephesus on his first missionary journey. And you know what? The Holy Spirit didn't let him.

He's moving westward across that Asia Minor landmass and he wants to sort of direct himself south and west and go to Ephesus. And what does the Holy Spirit do? It says there in Acts 16, verse 6, that the Holy Spirit forbade him to go to Ephesus. But it was in his heart.

Paul was already drawing up the plan, the strategy for Ephesus. The Holy Spirit said no, just yet. Not just yet.

That was his first missionary journey. So what does he do on his second missionary journey? He stops by Ephesus. Now he can't stay for long.

He only stays there seemingly a few days. He's on his way towards Jerusalem and he's in a bit of a hurry. But on his second missionary journey, he's sailing eastward back towards Jerusalem.

He stops in Ephesus. You can find it in Acts 18, verses 19, 20, and 21. He stops in Ephesus on his way back to Antioch.

And instead of staying longer, which the Ephesians wanted him to do, he only stayed a short time. But he left behind Aquila and Priscilla. Because Paul deliberately wanted to see a church planted there in Ephesus.

Now as soon as the second missionary journey is over, and the third missionary tour begins, Bam! Paul's in Ephesus again. Because he was just aching to get something started in Ephesus. And he deliberately planned it and strategized it.

And you can read it here. Let me just read you a couple passages. Acts 19, verse 1. This is the first verse of the third missionary tour.

Okay, ready? And it happened while Apollos was at Corinth that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus and finding some disciples on and on. Boom! That's what he started out with on his third. He targeted Ephesus.

Now, look at what happened there, and this is just a brief summary. Verse 10, Acts chapter 19. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia, that is the Roman province of Asia Minor, heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

That's an effective ministry, right? So this is what I want you to see. Antioch was a super effective, glorious church. Unbelievably organic in the way that it was founded.

Ephesus, unbelievably effective, powerful work of God there. But it was much more using deliberate planning and strategy from people of God, such as the Apostle Paul. So here we have these two models when we're talking about the mystery of multiplication.

More organic and more deliberate. Now, I say more organic and more deliberately, very intentionally, because every work must be organic, right? Every work must have the life of the Spirit, and every work must have some element of planning in it. But there's often a clear emphasis more in one direction or another.

Now listen. The organic, or should I say the more organic, has something to learn from the more deliberately planned. And the more deliberately planned has something to learn from the more organic.

I guess there's some of you, you're just by nature, more, hey, let's just flow with it. Let's see what happens. Let's see what the Holy Spirit's doing.

Wow! You have something to learn from your brothers and sisters who are better planners and strategizers and lay things out better. And then some of you, man, you're great at the planning. You're great at the strategizing, right? Man, you can come up with your 15-bullet plan to accomplish anything.

Well, that's great. God will use it. But please, can't you learn something from your brothers and sisters who are more of just that, let's see what the Holy Spirit does, and an emphasis just on the organic life of the Spirit.

But let me say this. In its history, Calvary Chapel has been a remarkable example of the more organic. It really has been.

Matter of fact, from my own study of church history, it is an amazing example of the more organic. There was no grand strategy from its founder, if you would want to call Chuck Smith the founder of the Calvary Chapel movement, so to speak. Do you know what Chuck Smith's great dream was? This was his great dream.

To have a church of 200 people. That's what he, ministerially speaking, that's what he fantasized about. Oh, if I could just have a church of 200 people.

That was his dream. You know, that dream got fulfilled a long time ago. But you know, he had no dream beyond that.

Beyond that, it was, wow, look at what the Holy Spirit's doing. There was no effort to build a movement through recruitment or marketing. There was no idea of ads in Christian magazines or in other kind of

media at that time that's saying, pastor, your church or church plant can be part of an exciting new movement.

Nothing like that at all. There was no team strategizing in somebody's office with a map of California or the United States or the world, for that matter, sticking pins saying, let's plant a Calvary Chapel church here and here and here. Nobody was doing that.

It's just like, hey, wow, man. It was the 70s. Let's just see what the Lord's going to do.

And there was little attempt. Now, let me say this. I'm trying to choose my words carefully.

I'm saying little attempt. I'm not saying no attempt. I'm going to say there was little attempt to preserve the gains through denominational structure and organization.

So listen, so many Calvary Chapel guys have the testimony. I really didn't have much idea what I was doing. I just stepped out in faith and did it.

I made a lot of mistakes along the way, but God taught me along the way. And somehow God did something wonderful. I got to say, Lance and I, we certainly have that testimony, don't we? Well, it'll be 30 years ago, right? This year in September.

Yeah. Well, listen, you're only applauding because you weren't with us back then. If you would have been with us back then 30 years ago, September 1982, you would have seen a 19-year-old kid.

And Lance was in his young 20s, I don't know, 24, 23, something like that. You would have seen a 19-year-old kid and a 24, who had had basically, well, very little experience at all. But we just loved Jesus and we just thought, why not? Let's do it.

And you know what? I look back on now in part with unbelievable joy and in part with horror. Thinking, what on earth were we doing? How could we do such a... We didn't know anything. And we didn't even know anybody who knew anything.

We weren't a church plant. We didn't have mentors. We didn't have somebody going... And you know what? I'll tell you what God did.

God put me and Lance together. And God just used us to teach each other, right? To be our own school of ministry right there. Now, I don't know if I'd ever recommend that to anybody.

But can I just say, there was something gloriously organic about it. Really. And that's kind of a history of what God has done in the Calvary Child movement.

A super, you might even say, hyper-organic movement. Now when I say that, I don't mean for a moment to say that God cannot and will not use more deliberate ways of church planting and ministry extension. No.

Matter of fact, I think He can and He does. And I think there's nothing... I'm looking for the right phrase and I hope you understand what I mean. There's nothing not Calvary Chapel about being more deliberate.

I'm not trying to say that at all. God can use and He will use more deliberate, planned ways of doing His work. Yet, even if we believe that God is leading us to do things in a more deliberate and planned way, we want to do it as organically as possible, right? Oh Lord, just dependent upon the life of your spirit.

Dependent on taking risks. Dependent on just stepping out and seeing what God might do. Because there is something wonderful about the organic element, even when it's sort of added to a strategy or plan that God might lead us to adopt.

Let me close with this. In 1899, it was a remarkable season in the Christian world. Christianity had been coming off of decades of remarkable advance.

Remarkable advance. Some historians and theological researchers, they call the 19th century, the 1800s, they call it the year of Christian advance. They call it the Christian century.

Just an amazing time. So coming off the edge of decades of unbelievable advance in the gospel, seasons of profound revival through the 19th century, in the year 1899, on the threshold of a new century, Christians thought they knew what was going to happen. Christians thought the 20th century, that's going to be the Christian century.

We are going to usher in a new move of the kingdom of God like people have never seen. And so in 1899, every denomination and every Christian group seemed to have a plan for evangelism. The Methodists planned to evangelize the entire United States.

They raised \$20 million. Can I say it again? In 1899, \$20 million? The Methodists raised \$20 million in 1899 and planned to lead 2 million people to Christ in a nationwide evangelistic campaign. The Baptists launched a program called Baptist Advance that was going to impact the nation with evangelism.

The Presbyterians launched a great evangelistic crusade. Again, the idea was, man, God's done so much in the 19th century, now in the 20th century, let's usher it in with a great work of God. It didn't happen that way.

One Methodist said this, God waited until we got our project out of the way before he sent revival. So what happened? Well, in the year 1904, there was a man named Reverend Joseph Jenkins of Newquay, Cardiganshire in Wales. In February of 1904, this man, who had been born during some great works of God in the previous century, and shaped by some previous works of God, he was very moved in his own soul.

He was burdened. Joseph Jenkins was burdened about a lack of concern, a lack of passion in his own heart, in his own voice in preaching. And so he sought a deeper knowledge of Christ.

You know who he started reading? Andrew Murray. Not that Arthur Murray guy, Andrew Murray. So he read Andrew Murray's great work with Christ in the school of prayer.

Joseph Jenkins was very burdened by the indifference that he saw in Christians around him. And he was particularly concerned about the apathy of young people in his own congregation. Doesn't change much to today, does it? So what did he do? In early 1904, he called the young people in his congregation before him, and he talked to them very earnestly about obeying the Holy Spirit.

And so in a prayer meeting for young people on Sunday morning, the pastor asked for the testimonies of these young people of their spiritual experience. Now, a lot of the young people wanted to talk about other stuff. They started trying to derail the conversation, but Reverend Jenkins brought it back again and again, and he firmly redirected them to the subject.

And so he said, come on, what do you mean? Who is Jesus Christ to you? And one young man said, Jesus Christ is the hope of the world. And Jenkins said, I don't mean that. What does he mean to you? Finally, one young girl who had just been converted a few days before, her name was Flory Evans, she stood up and she said with a tremor in her voice, I love Jesus Christ with all my heart.

Sometimes there's a way that the Holy Spirit moves that's beyond explanation. But those words, given in sincerity, lit that young people's group on fire. And that fire spread.

The movement grew until pretty soon, it came to a guy named Seth Joshua, who preached to a guy named Evan Roberts. And before long, the great Welsh and worldwide revival of 1904 was in full flower. Unbelievably organic.

But people prayed. They prayed in the midst of some discouraging times. So friends, that's just what we need to do.

We need to be about prayer, we need to be about great hearts and minds full of whatever God wants to do with multiplying his work. We need to appreciate the dual roles of both the organic and the more deliberately planned, because God can and will use them both as he continues to multiply his work. Father in heaven, multiply your work among us, Lord.

And Lord, we say, do it, Lord, in a way that draws all the attention to you. And it's so evidently the work of the Holy Spirit. In no matter what measure you use or ordain our plans and strategies, Lord, all of it, all of it needs to happen by the outpouring of your Holy Spirit.

So do it, Lord. We thank you for the greatness of your works in our time, and in times past. In Jesus' name.

Amen.

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